

**REMARKS**

In order to expedite the prosecution of the present application, Applicants have filed this Request for Continued Examination in which Claims 23 and 43 have been amended in order to more particularly point out and distinctly claim the subject matter that Applicants regard as the invention. Specifically speaking, Claims 23 and 43 now recite the contacting or pressing of a surface of the at least one plate member with a first electrode member at the first side of the butt portion at surfaces of the at least one plate member on opposite sides of the butt portion, at the second side thereof, with a second electrode member to cause an end face thereof to deform toward the other end face, melt and join with the other end face. Support for this amendment can be found in the figures of the present specification.

In the final rejection, the claims, pending at that time, were rejected under 35 USC 103(a) as being unpatentable over JP 60-6273 in view of JP 8-39261. Applicants respectfully submit that these references clearly do not present a showing of prima facie obviousness under 35 USC 103(a) with respect to the presently claimed invention.

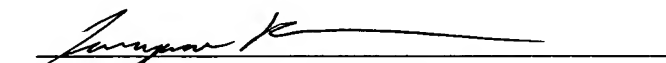
JP 60-6273 discloses a method for manufacturing a steel belt by respectively welding the distal and proximal ends of hot-rolled coils with mutually different sheet thicknesses. This method comprises the steps of pressing the thicker trailing coil (2) by a press machine (3) to homogenize the sheet thickness thereof with the sheet thickness of the thinner preceding coil, abutting the end faces thereof such that their respective centers along the sheet thickness direction are matched and then mutually welding the sheets. The press machine (3) of this reference is not an electrode member and, as required by the currently presented claims, the press machine of this reference does not contact surfaces of the coils at opposite sides of a butt portion during the pressing operation. Therefore, the secondary reference cited

by the Examiner must provide the motivation to one of ordinary skill in the art to modify this reference in a manner that would yield the presently claimed invention. It is respectfully submitted that the secondary reference contains no such disclosure.

JP 08-039261 discloses a relay welding process for band steel. As shown in the figures in this reference, end faces of the band steel are cut at a slant such that the joined end faces would have the same thickness as that of the band steel. After the end faces are joined, as shown in Figure 12, electrodes 33, 34 are brought into contact therewith to perform seam welding. Contrary to the Examiner's assertions, the electrodes do not serve as press members since the joined end faces are already at the thickness desired by this reference. Additionally, like the preceding reference, this reference has no disclosure of the second electrode member contacting surfaces of the at last one plate member on opposite sides of the butt portion at the second side thereof. As such, it is respectfully submitted that the references cited by the Examiner do not even present a showing of prima facie obviousness under 35 USC 103(a) with respect to the presently claimed invention.

Favorable consideration is respectfully solicited.

Respectfully submitted,

  
Terryence F. Chapman

TFC/smd

FLYNN, THIEL, BOUTELL  
& TANIS, P.C.  
2026 Rambling Road  
Kalamazoo, MI 49008-1631  
Phone: (269) 381-1156  
Fax: (269) 381-5465

Dale H. Thiel	Reg. No. 24 323
David G. Boutell	Reg. No. 25 072
Terryence F. Chapman	Reg. No. 32 549
Mark L. Maki	Reg. No. 36 589
Liane L. Churney	Reg. No. 40 694
Brian R. Tumm	Reg. No. 36 328
Steven R. Thiel	Reg. No. 53 685
Donald J. Wallace	Reg. No. 43 977
Sidney B. Williams, Jr.	Reg. No. 24 949

Encl: None

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